

CUBISM and Cubist art described in short tekst-quotes



'Still life with chair' Picasso 1912

Cubism, the modern French art movement rejected the subjective art style of Impressionist painting. Cubism started c. 1908 with the early Cubist paintings of Picasso & Braque. Art critic Jacob Bendien describes in text-quotes the characteristics, meaning, definitions & history facts of analytical and synthetic periods in Cubism. Famous Cubist artists were Picasso, Braque, Juan Gris, Leger.

The selected art quotes are taken from Jacob Bendien; from his artbook "Trends in the Present Day Art of Painting", published by W.L & J. Brusse N.V. – Rotterdam, after his death.

- editor: Fons Heijnsbroek / translation: Anne Porcelijn

- Cubism is not a homogenous art movement but, rather a collection of extremely differing movements and directions, all of which have undergone metamorphoses during their own development.

- However, for all its followers, the origin of Cubism was the same; a protest against Academic Art and Impressionism. Especially against the coquettish, polished and meticulous finish of the Academic artists, and against the superficiality and sensuality of Impressionism.

- Cubism was about masculinity, rigidity, angularity. It freed itself from previous art forms and pleasures. But, this was in fact only the ethical, aesthetic reaction of the Cubists to Academism and Impressionism. More important was the pure aesthetic art reaction, also a part of the resistance to Academism and Impressionism, but also partly building upon both these streams.

- Cezanne (read his artist quotes on TES, ed.) attempted to strictly structuralize according to the subject within this almost undifferentiated flow of emotions (by the impressionists artists, ed.). However, the emotion itself did

not gain structure but was placed in the painting as a displacement of the emotion. Cezanne was of the opinion that he was giving the painting back its classical constructive character.

- The history of Cubism consists chiefly of the ongoing battle between the two dimensional plane and three-dimensional nature, between the artists painting construction and the emotional contact with nature.

- When composing their mathematical figures into a painting, the Cubists tried to emphasize the construction as much as possible. Sharp corners and planes that expose the construction are not rounded off or smoothed into gradual transitions, but rather they are accentuated.

- In order to create a union between emotion and construction, the Cubists do not start from emotion but from construction. They do not look at nature purely emotionally, in order to build a construction into the emotion. They immediately see nature as a construction in art terms.

- Although Cubists thoroughly recognize the rights of a plane, they can never let the plane come into its own because they hold onto life inducing reality.

- To start with Cubists concentrated mainly on the form, the special area of construction so neglected by the Impressionists. Impressionism was more concerned with colour, the special area of emotion, and also with light, and atmosphere (read the quotes by Monet, ed.), This was ignored as much as possible by Cubism because it made the construction less clear.

- At first emotion was suppressed as much as possible in the composition, which leads to a sharpening of the lines. Also, as the forms of natural objects are only valued or used in their art or construction form, we see the Cubistic composition becoming more and more mathematical and abstracted, or more generalized. Incidental circumstances in form and color are excluded.

- Reality is reduced to great mathematical forms and planes of global color. Sometimes these forms retain the three dimensionality of reality (cubes, cones, pyramids), and sometimes they have adapted to the two dimensional plane (squares, circles or parts of them).

- For instance, we will recognize a human face because of the eyes, nose and mouth. For a Cubist these are often of secondary importance and nothing more than corners or rounded lines. All is material for the artistic composition.

- The various parts of the painting not only work together but also oppose one another. However, not always according to the laws of three-dimensional reality, but according to the laws of the art of painting. In this sense Cubistic paintings differ greatly from reality.

- When the difference from reality is such that we can no longer recognize this in the painting we should not draw the conclusion that it was unnecessary to involve reality in the first place. Even in this case reality is of value to the painting because of its inspirational effect on the artist.

- A male seriousness is apparent in Cubism, not a dogmatic strictness as in Neo-Plasticism (= De Stijl / the Style, read Mondrian's and Van Doesburg's quotes on TES, ed. The Cubists do not altogether conform to the Cubist system. Beside the systematic purification and abstraction they all remain very much in contact with the full and varied reality of life.

- In the delivery of their reasoning, the Cubists often tend to try to dissolve the stiffness of the rational by using an abundance of movement and spontaneity. Picasso particularly used this way of working, and was in fact often reproached for this by the stricter Cubists such as Gleize and Metzinger.

- During the first (cubist, ed.) period three-dimensional reality still had the upper hand in the plane. The form is purified of the incidental and emotions are suppressed.

- Color, reduced to be as sober as possible, was used only to accentuate forms, mainly still in a three dimensional form. This function of color had already been extensively used by Cezanne.

- The Cubists further extended the strengthening and sobering of form by acting more ostentatiously against the sensuality of art at the time. They found support for this from the lively African sculptures that formed a striking opposition to the often weak and refined art from Academic artists and Impressionists.

- In the mathematics of Cubist forms there was often a tendency to spiritualization, as was already seen in Cezanne's work, as well as an ambition to achieve a primitive strength as seen in African art. But this inner

opposition actually led to paintings, some of which are the ugliest, crudest and most awful ever made. However, this does not reflect on the importance of the basic aim.

- In the second period of Cubism the plane was not being handled entirely as a plane, but the domination of three-dimensional figures, of cubes, cones and pyramids was over.

The line became more important and light and darkness, which during the first period no longer entirely filled the role of natural light and darkness or shadow, was now once again taken up as art painting.

- When Cubists painted a portrait 'en face', but felt the nose was better shown 'en profile', this was simply turned in the plane. Thus parts of the front, side and back were all portrayed in one painting.

- They gave up the defiant rejection of all grace that typified the first period (of Cubism, ed.). Subjects were no longer divided into a few clumsy elements opposing one another, but divided into more smaller lines and planes, which often resulted in a light, airy and restful synthesis.

- Instead of laying out the object in a great number of small lines and picture planes, during the third period (of Cubism, fh) the Cubist painting was built up from larger parts, similar to the first period. However, now the planes were all put into front view and then, like theatre sets, placed one in front of the other.

- This way, we could say the space was immediately broken up, analyzed and synthesized, it was no longer one space but a whole series of planes placed one after the other, all the same width as the painting itself. We are beginning to see the plane in its true light (one famous and new invention of Cubism, ed.).

- Besides which, this compromise between the space and the plane opens up so many possibilities, with such strong and suggestive action, that we think this discovery is of the greatest importance. Especially when the planes placed one after the other express movement and these movements differ from one another in speed and direction (this aspect of Cubism was criticized by the Futurist artists in Paris, because they found Cubism painting very static and not moving at all, in opposition to Futurism art with its dynamic scenes of the modern city full of movements, fh). Picasso saw this possibility in the first period. Picasso used this to produce great work during the third period. Here we can see the relationship between Cubism and Futurism.

- However, for Cubism the quality of movement as is expressed by rhythm, is of great importance. Futurism places more importance on the quantity, speed and rhythm in speed.

- As opposed to Futurism art, Cubism art confines movement within the frame of the painting. The movement is often a whirling movement, to be seen in still life paintings by Juan Gris. Sometimes the planes placed one after the other whirl in opposite directions which gives a lively effect.

- The various planes in later Cubism are now painted in widely differing ways, with dots, stripes, crosses, brush strokes, squiggles etc. The color also changes from the uniform, somber colors of the first and second period, and now become a strong and vibrant colour contrast.

- The fourth period of Cubism has more in common with the second period. Lines appear more in the foreground. In Braque's work (read Braque's quotes on TES, ed.) the plane dominates as strongly as in art with a natural subject is possible. Therefore, the movement of the plane is diminished, but he compensates this by giving the lines more movement.

Braque's lines in his work show a certain correspondence to the lines in Passive Expressionists work, such as Nolde (German Expressionist senior painter of Die Brücke, ed.), but actually they are of a completely different character. Braque's lines are aesthetical and Nolde's are ethical. Braque's emotionality is an artistic method used to eliminate the stiffness and hardness of rationality, in which only the signature gives any subjective emotionality.

- In the fourth period (the last period of Cubism, ed.) the entire painting now gains an altogether more static character. Movement is more playful and often secondary to the whole, as in the second period. The work becomes more generally acceptable and less revolutionary.

- Of all the Cubists, Leger (read Leger's artist quotes on TES, ed.) developed the straight line without strong reactions the most. He actually worked more or less in the painting style of the fourth period right from the first period.

- It is as though everyone was stabilizing and consolidating their positions, which is perhaps the reason that Picasso now and then says farewell to Cubism only to return again, but never to the fourth period, but always the third.

- Right from the start Cubism was about discipline. This always brings with it the danger of Academism. The question is only: for how long is a style or manner of painting experienced as a style or way of life? When a style loses contact with life it becomes a mannerism and therefore soon becomes an Academic art form. However, Cubism continued renewing itself totally in each following period.

editor, Fons Heijnsbroek
transl. Anne Porcelijn